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O'CONNOR, FRANCIS WILLIAM. Color Systems. (1974)  
Directed by: Mr. Gilbert F. Carpenter. Pp. 5

This thesis was exhibited at the Weatherspoon  
Gallery of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
from May 4-12, 1974. On file in the Jackson Library of the  
University are 35mm color slides of the thesis.

COLOR SYSTEMS

by

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A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro

1974

Approved by

  
Thesis Advisor

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The  
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April 17, 1974

Date of Acceptance by Committee

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I hereby wish to acknowledge the assistance of my thesis advisor, Mr. Gilbert Carpenter, and also the other members of my thesis committee: Mr. Walter Barker, Mr. Joseph Crivy, and Mr. Andrew Martin.

## CATALOGUE

The following are specifics on the particular work included in the thesis exhibition. All paintings are acrylic on canvas; drawings are Prismacolor pencil. The dimensions give height before width.

### Paintings

1. Six Permutations of Vertical Groupings of Brown, Green, and Blue
  - a) Brown, Green, Blue 36"x36"
  - b) Brown, Blue, Green 36"x36"
  - c) Green, Blue, Brown 36"x36"
  - d) Green, Brown, Blue 36"x36"
  - e) Blue, Brown, Green 36"x36"
  - f) Blue, Green, Brown 36"x36"
2. Two Permutations of Vertical Groupings of Brown and Green
  - a) Brown and Green 72"x24"
  - b) Green and Brown 72"x24"
3. Dark Brown Painting, Self Portrait as John Soames 84"x48"
4. Canisteo 60"x60"
5. Twined Columns, Jeff's Boogie 48"x108"

### Drawings

1. Red Stratification Piece 96"x40"
2. Random Color Groupings Interrupted by Two Blue Horizontal Bands, Rainbows All Over Your Blues 96"x40"

There are two seemingly opposite directions simultaneously present in this current work. One is an emotive, lyrical color; the other is a rigid and formal mathematical system.

Color is particularly relevant to my work because its connotations exist apart from any physical manifestation. Mathematics, on the other hand, is a philosophy, non-existent physically, which needs a physical presence, if only symboloic, to be understood. Together they act as complements or in a symbiotic relationship. What color has, a physical reality, it gives to the mathematical system. What mathematics has, a straightforward logic, it gives to the color system. And what they both provide the viewer exists outside of this physicality and depends entirely upon one's thought processes, both rational and irrational. One can see the color and the mathematics to an extent, but the essence of the work requires sensing the color and understanding the logic of the system.

In addition to the primary focus of the work, this symbiotic relationship, there is also present an affinity to modern formalist painting and this specifically refers to the painted surface and its position relative to the wall and its own boundaries. The vertical-horizontal gridwork stabilizes the orientation of the painting in its two-dimensional plane much as a gyroscope stabilizes

a rocket in its three-dimensional path of flight. The regularity of the gridwork also parallels and echoes the edges of the painting or drawing itself. In addition, the stretchers, being over two inches deep, make a concerted effort to distinguish the plane of the painted surface from that of the wall.

If one were to concede that the grid could also be read as a graph, as cross-section paper, then it necessarily follows that the painting for that case, and in my opinion for each and every similar instance, must be read as a plane parallel to the wall. My superimposition in certain cases of circles and triangles, so far as the skeleton goes, reinforces this reading. By definition they are planar figures and are of the same plane as the cross-section that is the work. The randomness of placement and numbers of circles and triangles serves to distinguish my work from that of a more traditional viewpoint of a structured, preconceived design; any particular design is completely irrelevant to an understanding of what is actually on that canvas or paper. Here I am referring only to some design left by the grid, circles and triangles. The color system of a particular work is restrained by and confined to the individual segments of the grid pattern in that each segment has one color and this color shall not be adjacent to itself- otherwise, the color system is free to color out or color in any individual painting design.



There is a great deal of latitude in which the color can work. It can be and often is controlled both numerically and in specific color choice and placement. A work can vary from as few as four colors or one hue narrowed to a certain value range to something with virtually no control or limit. Most often the color is initiated in a random fashion and as more and more color is laid down more and more control and placement enter the picture. Frequently the color is so arranged as to give a suggestion of depth via what is almost an atmospheric perspective. There is always, however, a preconceived notion of what direction a particular work will take. That is, a mood is set and the color will elaborate on that mood.

It is quite clear that each of the two aspects of the work are thought out in completely different terms. One is cold, calculated and unchanging; the other is warm with feeling and changes both with each new viewer and with each sight by any certain individual. However, the particular situation which occurs on and with the canvas can only occur when these two opposing aspects are simultaneously present to augment the authority of the other.

One last aspect of the work that I feel to be rather important is the nature of the hard edges. At first glance it would seem to be very machine-like, but a more careful observation reveals many technical flaws; to me this is indicative of a sense of material and touch and also the

human gesture of abstract expressionism. We are talking about a man-made art. Because I do believe in a human aspect of art, I do more work than is actually necessary to make a point. In a sense I am ridiculing the machine. I do something completely unnecessary just because it is necessary to indicate a more than casual involvement with the work. There are no prints. Everything done is one of a kind. It is conceivable that I might try to do an identical copy of a work but essentially each piece is a stepping stone toward something beyond what I am now doing.

The artist (hereafter "artist" refers to what I think to be the ideal artist in an ideal situation) makes the relevant decisions concerning what he shall or shall not do next. Not all of these decisions should be rationalized, though they should not be haphazard either. In my opinion the artist is, in a sense, a kind of shaman or spiritual advisor. Without necessarily employing "trompe l'oeil" or depending upon a deception but using a somewhat natural situation, the artist tends to transfer the viewer mentally and intellectually to an almost supernatural or transcendental state of consciousness, to an empathy with the work and his total surroundings. In practical terms this amounts to a distribution of selective information on the part of the artist concerning the total environment. To this end the modes of traditional painting and sculpture

only give a hint as to the next step. They themselves are not quite capable of becoming a superior art form in our present world. Such a possibility for a truer art form lies in the mind and in all the senses, not just sight and touch, and in the capabilities of a new technology. To me art is similar to Zen. Once that which is being sought is found, in this instance "art", one becomes unaware that there once was a search. A void is filled and the void vanishes.

